

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/bahrain-crackdowns-on-pro-democracy-15-09-2011,40988.html>

Middle East & North Africa - Yemen

Repression continues

Crackdowns on pro-democracy protests continue to affect journalists, Morocco and Tunisia still try to gag information

15 September 2011

SYRIA

Ahmed Bilal, a producer with *Falesteen TV* who is known to be a supporter of democratic change, was arrested yesterday in the Damascus suburb of Mo'adamieh. Reporters Without Borders fears that he could suffer the same fate as Ghiyath Matar, a pacifist who was arrested in a Damascus suburb on 6 September because of his role within the Darayya coordination committee. He died on 12 September as a result of being tortured while in detention.

Reporters Without Borders is also concerned about the fate of Yahya Charbajji, an activist who was arrested at the same time as Ghiyath Matar.

It has meanwhile emerged that **Amer Matar**, a politically-committed journalist with the daily *Al-Hayat*, was arrested on 4 September. This is the third time he has been arrested since the start of the uprising in Syria in March.

BAHRAIN

Reuters photographer Hamad Mohamed was hit by a rubber bullet fired by a member of the security forces while covering a demonstration in A'ali (southwest of Manama) on 8 September. He was treated in hospital for a minor injury to the neck.

The government news agency BNA reported the incident, implicitly recognizing the responsibility of the security forces, and urged journalists to take all necessary care when working in areas where "rioting" was taking place.

YEMEN

Two journalists – **Abdul Hafez Al-Hatami**, a reporter for the *Al-Sahwa Net* news website, and **Refaat Al-Amiri**, a cameraman with the pro-opposition *Suhail TV* – were attacked by armed individuals while at a service station doing a report on the increase in fuel prices.

Ahmed Firas, a *Suhail TV* cameraman who was arrested by soldiers at Al-Daylami air-base southeast of Sanaa on 12 August, is being prosecuted on a charge of belonging to an armed band and putting out reports hostile to the Republican Guard.

Firas said he was tortured during interrogation at the start of September. He said he was struck with a rifle butt while blindfolded and was repeatedly insulted during his transfer from the base to the Criminal Investigation Department.

TUNISIA

Sami Ben Abdallah, a Tunisian blogger resident in France, was banned from leaving Tunisia at Tunis-Carthage international airport on 6 September. As he about to board a flight to Paris at 6:45 p.m., airport officials told him that they could not let him leave without clearance from the

interior ministry. The ministry then said he could not leave and, at 9:30 p.m., sent him a summons to report "as soon as possible" to the judicial police in response to a complaint filed against him on 3 September.

Abdallah was interrogated for eight hours the next day without being allowed access to his lawyer, Karim Jouaihi. Officially, he was questioned for allegedly sending insulting SMS messages. The messages were in fact his replies to threats and insults which he had received, and which were the subject of a complaint that he had himself just filed.

His family said the real reason for his arrest was the acerbic criticism of the country's current rulers that he had posted in his blog. He has also posted a series of investigative reports about Kamel El-Taief, a businessman close to former President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali.

MOROCCO

Mohamed Dawas, a blogger based in Fnideq, a town on the north coast between Tanger and Tétouan, was hit by police in the local police station after being arrested on 5 September and was forced to sign a statement against his will. Many fellow bloggers and activists were able to attend the first hearing in his trial on 8 September. The next hearing is scheduled for 16 September. An anti-corruption campaigner, Dawas edits the Fnidaq.com (<http://www.fnidaq.com>) news website and the Wikileaks.Fnideq Facebook page.

His lawyer, Abd Essadek Elbichtawui, told Reporters Without Borders that Dawas was arrested on a trumped-up charge of drug trafficking and the real reason was his blog posts. "His arrest is purely political but this is unfortunately not the first case of its kind," Elbichtawui said. "We are hoping for a fair trial because we are convinced of his innocence."
